

# Skier Profile

## William White – Improve, Adapt and Overcome

William White is not only a U.S. Marine Corps veteran but also a veteran of the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, participating this year for the sixth consecutive time. “I can’t hide my anticipation for this year’s Clinic,” he said. “This event encourages such positive rehabilitative changes in participants. It allows them to explore other obstacles that may have been personal barriers before – it teaches them to improvise, adapt and overcome!”

Growing up in Roselle, Ill., White felt a calling to serve his country after high school. Joining the Marines, he served for nearly 12 years as a communications chief. He served in the Gulf War and various other global conflicts in Somalia, Kuwait and Nicaragua. “It was an honor to be among those who answered their country’s call to arms in battle,” he recalled. He was discharged in late 1995 and moved back to Illinois in 1997 to help his father.

White attended night school and later was admitted to an elite electricians union. Once accepted, he excelled in the union and was even asked to instruct classes. Then, in March 2000 while working on an electrical high line, White was electrocuted by 75,000 volts of electricity. “There was a bright orange flash and a loud hum, then silence,” he said. “I was still belted in, and my right hand was burnt and mummified. I knew then it was the end of my right hand. I couldn’t feel my right foot either.” White was air lifted to the Loyola burn center. Because of the severity of the burns, doctors amputated his right leg below the knee and his right arm above the elbow.

Later, White asked many questions and read lots of magazines about prosthetics. He was determined to build dexterity in his left hand and strength in the rest of his body. Learning from videos, he was able to operate his prosthetic arm and leg with ease. Only nine months after his accident, he was ready to take on the challenge of the Rocky Mountains. Although he was always athletic, skiing was a new sport for White. Some members of a physically challenged sports team that White had met at the VA medical center in Hines, prodded him to attend the Clinic. “The next thing I knew, they gave me a plane ticket and there I was, on the slopes, ready to learn.”

Since then, White has made a lot of progress. “My first year, I couldn’t get off the bunny slope. “The following year, I only fell twice when I skied on the beginner runs. Now, I ski mostly all blue runs and a short black run once in a while.” Skiing at the Clinic prompted White to try new things, and he has since set ten world records as the first upright para athlete to compete in a National North American Scottish Highland Heavy Athletics Decathlon.

White’s expectations are high for this year. His goals include: not falling, maintaining longer overall runs, and beating last year’s time. “I’m also excited to meet new people and see several old friends,” he said. “Of course I can always gain some knowledge from the new veterans and make some self-improvements along the way.”

White believes it is those self-improvements which make the Winter Sports Clinic’s mental and physical therapy so unique. “Skiing helps develop balance, muscle tone, endurance and personal confidence. It teaches people mobility skills that can be used anywhere in life. What better way to test oneself than against Mother Nature?”